

From the Image of a Person to Its Electronic Incarnation

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The name was first. Later, the man adopted name.

The first names are given by Parents, next ones are sometimes attributed by the community; the Web name is adopted through independent individual decision, taken in solitude, in the glow of computer screen, consciously; it is related to the onset of existence in electronic reality. The adoption of Web Name, frequently resulting of personal choice, may become the start of Web activity, e.g. the implementation of various operations into the electronic reality, i.e. the electronic *realis*,¹ which is the term applied in this study. It is treated as an alternative sphere of being in relation to reality. Genuine human involvement can be found in it. It is related both to the utility aspect, i.e. the business/professional use, and the existential: emotional and spiritual involvement. The Web Name may become the source of meanings and messages representing the human being. These meanings may emerge and develop in proportion to increasing involvement in electronic *realis*. In effect, the Web Name accumulates significance and recognition, forging closer relation to the owner, thus becoming increasingly true and genuine.²

It is our intention to understand the process leading to identification of man and his/her activity, at least partial identification, with electronic *realis*, electronic sphere of existence. We refer essentially to 3-D environments or Multi-Users Dungeon. This process we interpret as a process of man's electronic incarnation (named also as a process of presenting), immersion and emergence in the electronic world. It is related to the process leading to development of electronic personality, i.e. the personality in reality of electronic *realis*. The process of electronic incarnation is accompanied by participation, activity, contribution of time, attention and involvement in the environment of electronic *realis*. We focus here on the process of electronic incarnation, as intentional in-penetration of human into the reality of electronic *realis*. The process of electronic incarnation is the discovery of place in electronic *realis*, the presence with possibly high level of involvement, resulting of profound immersion and initiation of new existence. The electronic incarnation is related to the emergence of spiritual values, the existence of which is embedded in the reality of electronic *realis*. Man finds the world in the reality of electronic *realis* by in-penetration, shaping it and providing with humanistic dimension.³ Auto-creation reveals values and mechanisms, and relates to personality enrichment and the value of co-existence in electronic community.⁴ Electronic incarnation is treated here as source of emerging values related to true experience.⁵

The process of electronic incarnation results from the total orientation of man towards electronic environment. Electronic incarnation may assume chronic, continuous character and intensify in time. The identification of activity in electronic *realis* leads to disintegration of the original perception of image, which is replaced by true existence in electronic *realis*. The notion of image loses significance and is replaced by interactive environment, the electronic world of man.

Electronic incarnation is a process experienced by over a million of users, entering electronic *realis* independently and for diverse reasons.⁶ The assumption of anonymity in relation to world reality keeps both realities discrete and support their mutually hermetic character. This situation stimulates the permanent incarnation into the electronic version of one's *self*, which consists in auto-creation and self-transformation. The question: *Who are you?* in electronic *realis* may elicit the response which contains meanings that might never be manifest in reality. The core of the process is electronic auto-identification, the gradual emergence in capacity of the citizen of electronic *realis*, conscious of one's existence in this capacity and aware of new possibilities related to this fact. Electronic incarnation involves the transformation of everything – essentially the entire real world – into immaterial form, and continuous implementation of human needs into electronic world.⁷ In this meaning, the incarnation process releases axiologically charged relations and involvement relying on true intentions. In effect, man reaches human meanings which in reality would often have but superficial significance as “labels” attached to reality fragments. In a part, electronic personality lives its own life, and, in another part, it remains symbiotically attached with the man “unsticks” from reality. The avatar has assimilated man and adopted his/her nature. Man has changed the sphere of his/her existence, changed his/her world.⁸

The electronic form “drags-in” the personality. But a “biological avatar” remains in reality. In a way, humanist values are increasingly embedded in non-biological substratum. In the process of migration to electronic *realis*, humans import these values with them. Consequently, the axiological dimension of electronic *realis* is constantly changed and increased. Since man is usually related to reality, in situation when alternative reality is encountered (which to some degree competes with the former one), he/she either balance between two realities, or, sometimes, makes the choice, and is born anew assuming a Web Name. The new person rises and starts existence in the reality of electronic *realis*.

¹ Similar notions, having genetic significance for the concept of electronic *realis*, can be found in Myron Krueger's “artificial reality” (1991, *Artificial Reality II*, Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Inc.) and Michael Heim's “virtual realism” (1998, *Virtual Realism*, New York: Oxford University,). These notions describe electronic reality in categories of technology (“virtual realism”) or artificiality (“artificial reality”). In present study, electronic *realis* is understood as a type of human reality.

² An example is provided by the *Second Life* electronic world. The wide interest in SL may have been based partially on behaviour patterns belonging to the sphere of reality, and partially caused by the possibilities provided by SL. In consequence, the needs of reality and possibilities provided by electronic reality are intertwined. (www.secondlife.com).

³ Popper, Frank, 2007, *From Technological to Virtual Art.*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, p. 355.

⁴ Cartwright, Glenn, F., 1994, "Virtual or Real? The Mind in Cyberspace", *The Futurist*, Mar/Apr, 28, 2

⁵ Heim, Michael, *Metaphysics of Virtual Reality*, New York, Oxford University 1993, p. 114.

⁶ Kluszczyński, Ryszard W. 2007, "From Film to Interactive Art: Transformations in Media Arts". In *MediaArtHistories*, O. Grau (ed.), Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, pp. 216-221 and 224.

⁷ Ascott, Roy, 2003, *Telematic Embrace. Visionary Theories of Art, Technology, and Consciousness*, University of California, p.264.

⁸ An example of the electronic incarnation process could be provided by Eduardo Kac's artistic work *Rara Avis*. Installation provides a medium for balancing between the real world and electronic environment. Due to the application of HMD technology, participant has the possibility of functioning both from "outside" and "inside" of a bird-cage. The use of HMD appliance has changed the participant's perspective. It enabled the participant's exists among the birds, inside the cage. It is not just the simple case of changing participant's spatial position from "outside the cage" to "inside the cage". The objective is to create in a different place. In reality any such attempt of integration with the environment of birds would have been practically impossible. Due to technology, which in this case means the broader context of electronic *realis*, man has acquired the possibility of accommodation in various new situations, which may lead to understanding of new meanings and co-existence. *Rara Avis* is plugged to the Web, which provides additional collective perspective: individual seeing is spatially generalized and multiplied, enabling mass perception, community of experience and an insight that is individual among multitude. The exercise becomes a common source of mass cognition and experience (Kac, Eduardo, 2005, *Telepresence & Bio Art. Networking Humans, Rabbits, & Robots*, University of Michigan, p. 162-166).